



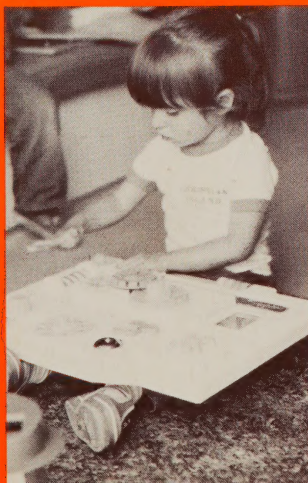
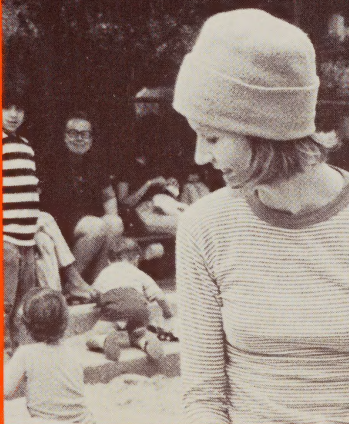
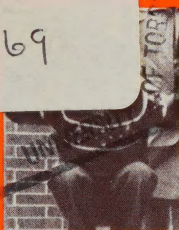
Ontario

Ministry of
Community and
Social Services

Day care

Tips on how to find and
buy day care for your child

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Editor's note. For simplicity, 'she' is used in this booklet but the material applies equally to men and women.

Day care – what is it?

For the purpose of this booklet day care is regular child care outside your home provided by someone other than yourself.

Day care: a buying decision

In choosing day care for your child, you are buying a service. As with most purchases, there are no real bargains. Good day care is invaluable, and poor day care is unacceptable at any price.

Your selection will depend on what's available in your community, the way you feel about the benefits that each day care setting can offer your child and your financial position.

Identifying your needs

Day care circumstances vary from community to community and from one family situation to another. Choosing a quality day care service will therefore take time, patience and planning. Your choice involves the safety and contentment of your child while in care outside your home.

In preparation for your search, you should consider the following:

- age of your child (up to age 10);
 - exact hours and days of care required;
 - part-time care to provide noon hour and after school supervision for the school-age child;
 - distance of the day care service from your home;
 - availability of transportation;
 - cost within your budget;
 - special language requirements; and
 - flexible hours to accommodate working overtime, shift work or business travel.
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The younger child

When choosing day care for a child younger than 18 months, specific needs should be met. Your baby should be comfortable and natural with the care giver. The care giver should understand how a baby's emotional and physical needs change. The number of children in care should be limited to ensure close attention to your baby's needs. Toys and equipment should be suitable.

The disabled child

Some full-day programs are specifically offered for physically and developmentally handicapped children from school age up to age 18. As well, special programs are offered in centres which put handicapped and non-handicapped pre-school children together.

Financial assistance

Under certain circumstances, families choosing supervised settings are eligible for financial assistance toward the cost of day care. Your eligibility will be based on total family income, total allowable expenses plus number and ages of children in care.

For more information contact the social services department in your local municipality.

Day care centre

A day care centre or day nursery is licensed by the Province of Ontario. It must meet standards which ensure that the setting is healthy, safe and staffed and equipped to provide activities for the child's development. The centre employs trained staff and offers a program which includes indoor activities, outdoor play and rest. Nutritious meals and snacks are provided. A centre serves groups of children of various ages and may be in a school, church, house or apartment building.

Day care centres provide full-day programs; some centres provide only half-day programs and these may be referred to as nursery schools.

If you have any questions call your nearest office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Home day care

In some areas a private home day care agency or municipality provides supervised home day care. A professional worker employed by the agency or municipality visits these homes to provide advice and suggested activities. These agencies will assist you in choosing the best setting for your child from among their homes.

Other day care arrangements may be offered by a neighbor, friend or relative in their home. This setting can provide a casual, personal environment much like your own home. This informal day care is unlicensed and represents approximately 80 percent of day care in Ontario.

If a home takes in six or more children, that setting must be licensed as a day care centre.

How to begin

Regardless of which day care option you prefer, and no matter how you plan your search, the important thing is to start early and persist. The search for day care can take weeks and sometimes longer. Consider the following steps:

- talk to friends, relatives, neighbors;
- look in the yellow pages of your phone book under Day Nurseries or in the blue pages under your provincial and municipal governments;
- contact community/neighborhood information centres, ethnic organizations, churches, medical offices, recreation centres, public health units, children's aid societies and the personnel department where you work;

- look at supermarket bulletin boards or local newspaper want ads or personal columns; and
- advertise your requirements in newspaper want ads or put a notice on bulletin boards in community centres, churches, and supermarkets.

The search for and investigation of day care for your child should be a family responsibility. Whenever possible at least two family members should be involved.

A licensed day care setting has written program information available and is regulated and inspected by the Ontario Government. Therefore you may only require one visit and interview. On the other hand the unlicensed home setting may require more than one visit to make the best choice.

The phone call

A telephone call can often eliminate day care that is just not suitable for you or your family. Contact a number of day care settings and talk about: openings, cost, location, hours of care, the age of your child and the ages and number of other children in care. You may have special concerns: for example, pets, play area, special diet, health problems and the care giver's experience.

If you are satisfied with the information, set up an interview preferably during a time when you can see the children involved in some activity.

The interview - day care centre

When you visit a day care centre you should ask for a written statement on the following:

- services offered and age range served;
- number of other children in care;
- hours of operation and holidays observed;
- policy on payment including statutory holidays, days when the child is ill and when your family is away on vacation;
- how much it costs, how to enrol and the policy for cancellation;
- the cost of late pick-up; and
- what your child will be doing during the day.

After the statement has been reviewed ask for a tour to see how the children and staff get along together. There should be a variety of things for the children to do such as painting, playing with sand and water, singing and other learning activities. Discuss outside play and events that your child may be involved in such as trips to the library or a park and whether suitable clothing may be required for different activities.

Discuss the centre's approach to caring for your child and make sure that you agree on such matters as discipline, giving medication, rest and nutrition. Find out how often you will have discussions with the care giver about your child's progress. Parent participation in a child's out-of-home care is important.

After completing your investigations, contact the centre you have chosen to confirm your decision and the date your child will start.

The first interview - home care

The initial interview is your chance to see a number of day care homes in operation. Take your child along. Observe the children in the home while they are involved in some activity or play and see how your child responds. Ask whether the care giver reads stories, offers challenging activities and introduces new games and learning into the daily routine. Find out how much television viewing is permitted and whether it is restricted to children's programs.

You will need to give the care giver general information about your child and any special needs he or she requires. Talk about meals, discipline, activities that your child enjoys, regular sleeping hours and health care.

Ask the care giver about herself, the service she provides and her home.

- How long has she been providing day care and does she plan to continue for the long term?
- Will there be other adults present during the day?
- Will additional children be in care during the noon hour or after school?

It is important that you tour the home to check safety features (see checklist page 15). There should be plenty of space for the children to play and rest. Ask to see the yard and the play equipment. Find out about daytime outings such as trips to a playground or store.

Ask for references.

The second interview - home care

After completing your day care investigations, review your findings with your family. You may want to return to one or more places for a further interview. Additional information you require may have to do with insurance, notice for cancellation of the arrangement, payment when your child is ill or on vacation, what happens when the care giver is unavailable.

Starting day care

Once you have made your choice, it is advisable to get all information in writing. A letter of confirmation to the care giver will ensure that you both understand the terms of your arrangement. Keep a dated copy of the letter and give the original to the care giver (see example page 10).

During the first few weeks of day care you will have an opportunity to see how your child and the care giver get along with each other on a daily basis. When things are working out, your child should be eager to go to the day care home or centre and, at the end of the day, while happy to see you, may be having a good time and be reluctant to leave. If your child is able to talk, you should sense his enthusiasm about what happened during the day.

If your child is not eager to go to day care, or if he is continually unhappy or distressed, you should investigate to see if there are reasons to remove him. Evidence of abuse, irresponsibility, or unreliability on the part of the day care service means the immediate removal of your child from the situation. If you suspect a possibility of child abuse, you should report this information to your local children's aid society.

Maintaining a business relationship

Your responsibility toward quality day care is to be a good customer. Always be on time to drop off or pick up your child. If you must be late, contact the care giver ahead of time. Tell the provider when someone other than yourself will be picking up your child.

The day care provider should be paid fairly and promptly. You are entitled to good day care, and the provider is entitled to respect and a fair wage. You will have to be prepared to pay for overtime care and for increases in the day care rate when they are warranted.

Maybe you will want to drop in occasionally during the day to see how things are going. The day care provider should welcome these visits and appreciate your interest.

As with other business relationships, honest communication not only helps maintain good day care but can substantially improve it. Be frank about your concerns regarding the care your child is receiving and deal with them immediately. You may find that your concerns can be resolved quite simply.

Establish a partnership with your care giver. You will both play an important role in your child's life.

Confirming letter

Day Care Giver,
123 Main Street,
Anytown, Ontario.

Dear Care Giver:

It was very pleasant talking to you this afternoon about your providing day care for my child. I would like to confirm some of the points we covered in our conversation.

Your understanding of the benefits of stimulating daytime activity was one of the key reasons why we chose to place Chris in your care. We fully agree on the importance of outdoor play, learning-oriented activities, having stories read and going on occasional outings. Also, Chris should nap for one hour in the afternoon.

I understand that you will provide Chris with juice, healthful snacks, and a hearty lunch. I would appreciate it if there are no sweets.

As agreed, you will care for Chris from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. I will let you know if it is ever necessary for someone else to pick up Chris.

As we said, Chris will be kept home when sick to protect the other children in your care, and I expect that the same rule will apply to other parents. Should you become ill I understand that you have arranged for an appropriate back-up support person.

In the event of an emergency I have supplied you with my doctor's name and telephone number and the OHIP information.

The fee for your day care service will be \$00.00 which I will pay by cheque every Friday. Any additional expenses for Chris will be reimbursed at this time as well. Should I be late in picking up Chris for any reason, there will be an overtime payment of \$0.00 as we discussed.

We both agree that if, for any reason, either of us should wish to terminate the relationship, two weeks notice will be given. I agree with your position on payment for statutory holidays, family vacation or if Chris is ill.

I look forward to working with you, and I know that Chris will enjoy the excellent care you provide.

Sincerely,

Day Care Buyer,
222 Jones Street,
Anytown, Ontario.



Comments





Buying a day care service: summary checklist

Payment

Fee _____
How to pay _____
When to pay _____
Overtime cost _____
Additional expenses _____
Income tax deductions _____
Payment during vacation _____
Payment during child's illness _____

Time

Exact hours & days of care _____
Drop-off time _____
Pick-up time _____
Date child to start _____

Setting

Distance _____
Transportation _____
Safety _____
Play area _____
Rest area _____
Outdoor play ground _____
Number of other children _____
Ages of other children _____
Number of care givers _____
Other adults present _____
Pets _____
Equipment _____

You may want to take these lists with you.

Program

How to enrol _____

How to cancel _____

Who picks up your child _____

In case of emergency _____

Activities _____

Outings _____

Meals _____

Approach to child rearing _____

Discipline _____

T.V. _____

Special language _____

Parent participation _____

Progress reports _____

Clothing _____

Holidays observed _____

Insurance _____

Back-up support _____

Care giver's experience _____

References _____

Your child

Age _____

Medical history _____

Special diet _____

Previous day care experience _____

Special interests _____

Notes

Suggested day care site safety checklist

Outside

- ☐ No broken bottles, cigarette butts or other dangerous objects.
- ☐ No loose steps or railings.
- ☐ Play area is sufficiently large and securely fenced.
- ☐ No sharp corners or slivers on play equipment.
- ☐ No toxic plants.

Inside

- ☐ No frayed extension cords or overloaded wall plugs.
- ☐ Look for safety caps on wall plugs.
- ☐ No smoking materials, ashtrays, lighters or matches within child's reach.
- ☐ Windows or screens securely locked.
- ☐ Stairways protected with gates. Balcony doors secured.
- ☐ No guns, knives and dangerous tools.
- ☐ No toxic plants.
- ☐ Smoke detector.
- ☐ An emergency evacuation plan.

Room by room

Bedroom

- ☐ Electrical appliances, clocks, vaporizers, and heaters are out of reach.
- ☐ No dangling strings from curtains or blinds within reach of the child's bed.
- ☐ No diaper pins or other sharp objects within child's reach.

Bathroom

- ☐ No drugs, medicines, or objects such as razor blades within the child's reach.
 - ☐ Bathroom door can be unlocked from outside.
 - ☐ All electrical appliances, hair dryers, curlers and radios out of child's reach.
 - ☐ Plastic or paper disposable cups instead of drinking glasses.
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Kitchen

- ☐ Pot handles turned to back of stove.
- ☐ Ask about fire safety. How would day care giver deal with a kitchen fire? Is there a fire extinguisher?
- ☐ All cleaners, poisons, soaps, bleaches, polishes, alcohol and plastic bags stored separate from food, and out of the child's reach.

You may wish to add other points of evaluation prior to your visit.

Notes



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For more information contact the nearest area office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The telephone number will be found in the Ontario government section of the blue pages in the back of your directory.



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